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## Stress Levels and Coping Mechanisms of Mothers in Barangay Labangon, Cebu City

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### Abstract

The study aims to focus in comparing stress levels and coping strategies of mothers with a child studying in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center. Specifically, it aims to determine the different stressors, levels of stress and different coping mechanisms of mothers in Barangay Labangon. It uses a descriptive method of research, with survey questionnaires as data gathering instruments, and Microsoft Excel for statistical analysis. Two (2) standardized tools were used: an eighteen (18) item test, “Parental Stress Scale”, which is adapted from Berry and Jones (1995) and David L. Tolbin’s seventy two (72) item questionnaire, “Coping Strategies Inventory”, which was adapted from Folkman and Lazarus’ (1981) “Ways of Coping” questionnaire. T-test was used to determine the significant difference between the means of the two (2) variables. Purposive sampling was used to get a total of one hundred (100) respondents: fifty (50) each from both schools.

Based on the study, the main reasons of the mothers' stress include having children means having a financial burden, children’s behavior is embarrassing, difficulty in balancing different responsibilities because of children, and choices and control over mother’s lives become few and little because of children.

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For stress level, results revealed a mean score of 3.85 for the elementary school mothers, and a mean score of 3.9533 for the day care center mothers, both having a descriptive equivalent of “High Level of Stress”. Likewise, for the coping mechanisms, a mean score of 3.4106 and 3.4013 both with a descriptive equivalent of “Less Likely”, were generated for the mothers of the elementary school children and day care center, respectively. With no statistical significant difference found between the stress levels and coping mechanisms of mothers having a child in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center, it is recommended that future researchers utilize a wider scope of focus such as comparison of mothers with children from the primary and secondary levels as the respondents.

**Keywords:** stress; stress level; coping mechanisms.

## 1. Introduction

Mothers are dubbed as the light of homes. They take care of their children, protect, and nurture them with values that will make them a better person. They are the first teacher, friend, and defender. Married or a single mother, widowed, full time employed or plain housewife, regardless of status, mothers would do anything for the best interest of their children.

Being a parent can be one of the most difficult jobs a person can ever have. Considering the developmental descriptions of child behavior, there are lots of behavior that may warrant for greater consideration, understanding, and patience on the part of parents, especially mothers. Difficulty begins as early as infancy, and progresses to preschool, and primary school years. As mentioned by Johnson in his book *“Therapist’s Guide to Pediatric Affect and Behavior Regulation”*, a preschooler’s disturbing behavior may include violent outbursts/reactions, noticeably aggressive and/or negative, and an almost desperate drive to seek control of the environment, while it is impulsiveness and aggressiveness for primary school years [1]. This can further be more challenging if the child is in his adolescent years and outside factors come into picture and may create influences in his decision-making. However, in spite of the challenges, most parents want their children to become independent, productive and capable of coping with life’s challenges.

Unfortunately, mothers are not immune to diseases, fatigue, and even stress. One, the stress they feel as a parent will continue throughout the course of their lives and the lives of their children as supported by an article from The Adrenal Fatigue Solution, which shares among others: "These are the facts. First, the stress you feel as a parent will continue throughout the course of your life and the life of your children. The sources of that stress, and how best to deal with it, is what changes as you and your children grow. Second, stress-free parenting is as much of a myth as Bigfoot. Stress is an inherent aspect of parenting; you will not eliminate it, but you can try to prevent some of it and effectively manage the rest [2]". Combining problems from home, workplace, and general exhaustion, will surely allow a mother to become susceptible to stress that comes in different kinds. Depending on the person’s character, the intensity or level of a certain stressor also varies. Thus, due to these stresses, the parenting strategy or coping mechanisms of a mother may also change.

Psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman scientifically defined coping as “the sum of cognitive and

behavioral efforts, which are constantly changing, that aim to handle particular demands, whether internal or external, that are viewed as taxing or demanding [3]. Thus, in an attempt to seek and apply possible solutions to fight-off stress, individuals must be capable of knowing different forms of de-stressing methods. These said methods come in different ways depending on what the stressors are and who will undergo such a dilemma. De-stressing methods can be simple in ways, such as listening to music, seeing children happy, or opening up to other parents seeking for advice, to a profound method like a weekend vacation or a shopping spree. Also, the effects of these coping mechanisms vary, since mothers undergo different kinds of stress on various scales of intensity.

The study is therefore aimed at

1. identifying and comparing the different levels of stress of mothers residing in Barangay Labangon with a child in Labangon Day Care Center and mothers with a child in Labangon Elementary School;
2. identifying and comparing the respondents' coping mechanisms;
3. determining if there is a significant difference between the stressors of mothers having children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School; and
4. determining if there is a significant difference between the respondents' coping mechanisms.

It is assumed that there is no significant difference between the stressors and coping mechanisms of mothers having children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Setting and respondents**

The research covered and surveyed a total of 100 mothers from Barangay Labangon, Cebu City. Fifty (50) mothers were from Labangon Day Care Center, and the other fifty (50) mothers from Labangon Elementary School. Labangon Elementary School is a public school that has students mostly coming from low-income families. As such, older students would normally go to school alone without the need to be accompanied by parents. Younger pupils on the other hand, are accompanied by the mother, father, or an older sibling. Grade 1 pupils are the more common pupils who are accompanied by their mothers when they go to school. However, of the approximately 200 Grade 1 pupils enrolled, not all were with their mothers. Therefore, to be able to get an accurate sample to represent the mothers from the Elementary level, only 50 of them were selected as respondents. This is to equally match the 50 mothers of preschoolers who regularly bring their child to Labangon Day Care Center.

### **2.2 Instrument**

The study utilized 2 standardized tools: the stress tool, "*Parental Stress Scale*", an 18 – item self-report positive and negative scale with a test-retest reliability of .81 [3], and the "*Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI)*" with alpha coefficients of 0.71 to 0.94 (m=83) and validity assessed in several ways (factor structure, criterion and construct validity) [4].

### 2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

After obtaining permission from the school principal, the researchers requested the 50 respondents from Labangon Day Care Center and 50 respondents from Labangon Elementary School to answer the questionnaires given to them. Follow-up interviews were likewise conducted to confirm submitted answers.

Data was then tallied to obtain desired results for the levels of stress and different coping mechanisms of the mothers in Labangon, Cebu, City.

### 2.4 Statistical Treatment

T-test was used in getting the significant difference between the stress levels and coping mechanisms of mothers in Barangay Labangon having a child or children in the Day Care Center and in the Elementary School.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The following data focuses on the comparison of stress leveling and coping mechanisms of mothers with children in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center. Likewise, descriptive data are also presented.

### 3.1 Causes of stress and stress level

The different causes of stress may differ from one person to another due to experience. Not surprisingly though, mothers who reside in Barangay Labangon and have children enrolled in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School share the same stressors. Table 1 presents the top four (4) causes of stress of both mothers with a child in the Day Care Center and in the Elementary School.

**Table 1:** Respondents' causes of stress

RESPONDENTS	CAUSES OF STRESS	RANK
Mothers from Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School	Having children means financial burden	1
	Behavior is embarrassing	2
	Difficulty in balancing different responsibilities because of children	3
	Choices and control over mother's lives become few and little because of children	4

There is no doubt that having a child or children would mean additional cost for family living. Just the mere fact that a child should receive basic needs, including education, and be given quality love and attention, can already be considered as major responsibilities of parents, especially for Filipino mothers who have emphasized the role of good parenting in raising competent children, as cited in the study by Daganzo [6]. However, this ideal way of raising a child seems indistinguishable, especially in cases when mothers think about family matters as

additional burden, such as the need to pick up a child from day care or bring a sick child to a doctor [7]. This is further discussed by Gwen Dewar when she said that parents are stressed more when they have a young child, or a child with a difficult temperament, or with medical, emotional, or behavioral problems, or when they have low levels of social support [8]. These things are greatly emphasized on the abovementioned results of the respondents' causes of stress, specifically highlighting facts based on research results that having children means additional financial burden/concern, additional patience and understanding required for children with behavioral problems, and mothers' difficulty in balancing other responsibilities apart from taking care of their children. Moreover, Table 2 presents the levels of stress of the respondents.

**Table 2:** Different levels of stress of mothers in Barangay Labangon

Mothers	Levels of Stress											
	Very High		High		Average		Low		Very Low		Mean	DE
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Day Care Center	16	32	27	54	7	14	0	0	0	0	3.9533	High Level of Stress
Elementary School	13	26	27	54	10	20	0	0	0	0	3.85	High Level of Stress

#### *Interpretation of Score for Parental Stress Scale*

4.2 - 5.0	<i>Very High Level of Stress</i>	The person needs to act now to reduce stress.
3.40 - 4.19	<i>High Level of Stress</i>	The person should think seriously about changes in life to reduce stress.
2.60 - 3.39	<i>Average Level of Stress</i>	Lowering the person's stress level would be beneficial.
1.80 - 2.59	<i>Low Level of Stress</i>	The person's stress level is low.
1.00 - 1.79	<i>Very Low Level of Stress</i>	The person is more likely not exposed to stressful situations.

Table 2 shows that of the 50 respondents from Labangon Day Care Center, most of the mothers,  $N = 27$  or 54% of them were experiencing a high level of stress, while 16 or 32% of them were experiencing a very high level of stress, 7 or 14% experienced average stress, while none experienced low or very low levels of stress.

The other 50 respondents, who were from the Elementary School, had mostly set their stress level on a high level which totaled to 27 respondents or 54% of the mothers. 13 or 26% of them are experiencing a very high level of stress, 10 or 20% on average, then 0% on the low and very low stress levels.

Both groups showed that they were experiencing high levels of stress based on the computed mean scores. The mean score of the mothers in the Day Care Center was 3.9533, while the mothers in the Elementary School had a mean score of 3.85. Both mothers experienced high levels of stress with an overall average mean of 3.9017.

In a study conducted to 368 mothers and 241 fathers who worked outside home, Barbara Schneider of Michigan State University reported that the working mothers spent 10.5 more hours every week in multitasking (preparing dinner, doing laundry, and work brought from office, while talking to child and doing homework) compared with working fathers [9]. The result proves that more hours spent on multitasking, especially for working women, creates a greater feeling of stress. This is further supported by a psychologist from University of Texas, Russell Poldrock, when he said that multitasking over a number of hours allows the work of the brain to be overloaded, which triggers a chemical response related to stress [9]. Therefore, mothers, working or not, married or single, is somehow expected to multitask several hours in a day, which greatly contributes to a higher level of stress.

### ***3.2 Different coping mechanisms***

When subject to feelings of stress and tension, not all mothers were able to cope with the difficulties that they were facing. To deal with different stressors, there are also different coping mechanisms that they can employ in order to help them deal with the discomfort.

Table 3 presents the different coping mechanisms of the respondents.

There are different stressors that are deemed as very helpful to the mothers in dealing with the different stressors in their lives. Sixteen (16) out of the 100 respondents answered that since their problem was tricky, they had to work out around the edges to make things come out all right. They also looked at things in a different light and tried to make the best of what was available to find a solution to their problems. Nineteen (19) wanted to spend some time by themselves, while some mothers talked to someone they were very close to and accepted their sympathies and understanding. Moreover, they also tried to look at the bright side of things. Thirty-three (33) of them found somebody who was a good listener. Others concentrated on what they had to do next and told themselves things that would help them feel better. Most of them hoped for a miracle to happen, and that the problem would just go away or fix itself.

The ability to cope us with stress actually varies from person to person. Some individuals can easily adapt to stresses and will eventually try or use certain mechanisms to be able to adjust and deal with stress effects effectively. On the other hand, others may find it quite difficult to adapt to stress that may cause unpleasant changes. In the case of mothers for example, it might help to consider Huxley's postulate when he said that "adaptation to an ever-changing environment requires a flexible response system characterized by a broad repertoire of responses for handling diverse situational demands" [10]. With the top 10 coping mechanisms

exhibited by the mothers in this study, clearly they are able to be flexible enough to maximize possible ways of helping themselves feel better in spite of their current situation/condition. Besides, if mothers can handle stress effects more effectively, then there is a higher possibility that they can be moderately to less stressed, and could therefore execute more authority over their children [11].

**Table 3:** Respondents' coping mechanisms

RESPONDENTS	COPING MECHANISMS	RANK
Mothers from Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School	Problem would just go away	1
	Hoped for a miracle to happen	2
	Speak to self and tell things that would just make themselves feel better	3
	Concentrated on what they had to do next	4
	Look for someone who is a good listener	5
	Tried to look at the bright side of things	6
	Talked to someone very close to, to accept sympathies and understanding	7
	Spend some time by themselves	8
	Looked at things in a different light and tried to make the best of what is available to find a solution to their problem	9
	Since problem was tricky, they had to work around the edges to make things all right	10

Table 4 shows that from the 50 respondents or mothers coming from Labangon Elementary School, 27 or 54% of them were less likely aware of the different coping mechanisms available in coping with their stresses. There were 22 mothers or 44% who were somewhat aware, 1 or 2% having a little awareness and 0% for most likely and not at all aware about the different coping mechanisms of a mother.

In the same manner, 50 respondents or mothers coming from Labangon Day Care Center, showed a result that 23 mothers or 46% of the respondents were somewhat aware of the different coping mechanisms, 18 or 36% of them were less likely aware about it, 6 or 12% of them were most likely aware of the different coping coping mechanisms, 3 or 6% has a little awareness and 0% or no one was not aware at all.

**Table 4:** Coping mechanisms of mothers in Barangay Labangon

Mothers	Coping Mechanisms											
	Very High		High		Average		Low		Very Low		Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Day Care Center	6	12	18	36	23	46	3	6	0	0	3.4031	Less Likely
Elementary School	0	0	27	54	22	44	1	2	0	0	3.4106	Less Likely
Total	6	6	45	45	45	45	4	4	0	0	3.4069	Less Likely

*Interpretation of Score for CSI:*

4.2 - 5.0	Most Likely	The person is less likely to feel stressed because they are familiar with how they react to certain situations.
3.40 - 4.19	Less Likely	The person knows how to cope with the problems at hand.
2.60 - 3.39	Somewhat	The person decently manages stress.
1.80 - 2.59	A little	The person needs to improve how she copes with problems to reduce stress.
1.00 - 1.79	Not at all	The person needs to develop different coping mechanisms to be able to deal with problems more effectively.

Based on the results gathered, mothers from Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School had a mean score of 3.4031 and 3.4106, respectively. This means that these mothers were less likely aware of the different coping mechanisms available to help them cope with the stresses in life. In totality, mothers were less likely to be aware of and adapt with the different coping mechanisms available with an average mean of 3.4069.



### 3.3 Significant difference Between the Stressors of Mothers with Children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School

Table 5 below shows the computed value of the gathered data with regard to the two schools' stress leveling of mothers.

**Table 5:** Significant difference between the stressors of mothers with children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School

Mothers	Stress Level		T-Computed Value	T-Tabular Value	Interpretation
	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent			
Day Care Center	3.9533	<i>High Level of Stress</i>	1.06	1.980	There is no significant difference between the levels of stress of mothers having children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School.
Elementary School	3.85	<i>High Level of Stress</i>			

The 50 mothers from Labangon Elementary School had an average mean of 3.85, which had a descriptive equivalent of a **High Level of Stress**. Another 50 mothers from Labangon Day Care Center had an average mean of 3.9533, which was also considered as **High Level of Stress**. Since the T – computed value is lesser than the T – tabular value, it appears clearly that there is no significant difference between the levels of stress of mothers having children in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center.

According to a study by the American Sociological Association, it was discovered that contemplating on family issues during the workday takes a greater toll on mothers than fathers in the form of increased stress and negative emotions [7]. This is evident in the result of the current study as shown in Table 5, which validates that being a mother of a preschooler and a Grade 1 pupil does not constitute much of a difference when it comes to stress experience. Therefore, since the role of mothers of pupils from Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School would always be mothers to their children, either working or not, they would always be the ones bearing the majority of the responsibilities for child care and family affairs. And a closer age gap, though of different school levels, does not guarantee that there would also be a change in the stress levels of mothers.

Table 6 shows the computed value of the collected data in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center as regards the coping strategies of mothers. The 50 mothers from Labangon Elementary School had an average mean of 3.4106, which was considered as **Less likely** to be aware of and to adapt to different coping mechanisms, while the other 50 mothers from Labangon Day Care Center had an average mean of 3.4031,

which was also considered as *Less likely* to be aware and adapt to coping strategies. Since the T-tabular value is greater than the T-computed value, assumption is therefore true that there is no significant difference between the coping mechanisms of mothers having children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School.

**Table 6:** Significant difference between the coping mechanisms of mothers with children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School

Mothers	Coping Mechanism		T-Computed Value	T-Tabular Value	Interpretation
	Mean	Value			
Day Care Center	3.4031	<i>Less likely</i>	0.07	1.980	There is no significant difference between the coping mechanisms of mothers having children in Labangon Day Care Center and Labangon Elementary School.
Elementary School	3.4106	<i>Less likely</i>			

It was stated that most of the results were to accept the null hypothesis, which indicated that there were no significant differences between the levels of stress and coping mechanisms of a mother having children in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center. Possible factors affecting these are:

- Age difference of the mother
  - The younger mothers are often times more susceptible to experiencing an increased level of stress compared to older, more experienced mothers.
- Closeness in age of the children within their peer groups
  - Mothers with children within the ages of 5-12 seem to experience the same kind of stressors, thus resulting in no significant difference between having a child in day care and in having a child in elementary.
- Role Theory
  - Refers to a perspective manner, which means that a certain individual should act or perform according to his/her designated positions or role and in the case of mothers, they also have other roles apart from being a mother (teacher, statistician, banker, doctors, etc.)
- Resiliency
  - Refers to the ability of a person to overcome or be tolerant to certain big responsibilities or situations.

- Attachment theory
  - Human beings are born with innate psychological system that motivates them to seek emotional bonds that connect from one person to another. A young child needs to develop a relationship with at least a primary caregiver for social and emotional development. This may vary on how does the child or children are attached to their mother.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Based on the findings of our study, it was found out that mothers having children in Labangon Elementary School and Labangon Day Care Center had no significant difference as regards their stress levels, wherein respondents experienced situations that entailed high levels of stress.

Likewise, it was shown that there was no significant difference between the mothers of the two schools as regards their coping mechanisms, proving that they were less likely aware of the different coping mechanisms that they could adapt when they are experiencing stress.

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